

The INQUIRER

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Keeping Peace

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Rev Chris Hudson
Souls, Belfast

The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest
Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

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Editor M Colleen Burns MA

46A Newmarket Road

Cringleford

Norwich NR4 6UF

ph: 01603 505281

e: inquirer@btinternet.com

Copyeditor Sarah Reynolds

Cover photo by Jim Corrigall. The Rev
Chris Hudson after the service in All
Souls Church, Belfast.

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Cheques payable to 'The Inquirer'.
Write to Lorna Hill

24 Lodge Lane

Keymer, Hassocks

West Sussex, BN6 8NA

ph: 01273 844940

e: inquirersubs@gmail.com

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or email info@unitarian.org.uk

The General Assembly, Essex Hall

1-6 Essex Street

London WC2R 3HY

ph: 0207 2402384



Photo by James Barry

Inquiring Words Indian Summer

These are the days when birds come back,
A very few, a bird or two,
To take a backward look.
These are the days when skies put on
The old, old sophistries of June, –
A blue and gold mistake.
Oh, fraud that cannot cheat the bee,
Almost thy plausibility
Induces my belief,
Till ranks of seeds their witness bear,
And softly through the altered air
Hurries a timid leaf!
Oh, sacrament of summer days,
Oh, last communion in the haze,
Permit a child to join,
Thy sacred emblems to partake,
Thy consecrated bread to break,
Taste thine immortal wine!

– Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

Correction

Owing to a production error, the GA information on the upcoming election on page 5 did not appear in the previous issue as had been requested.

Creating peace for 'All Souls'

Chris Hudson, a Unitarian minister and long-time peace worker was back at the negotiating table after trouble flared recently in Belfast.

Jim Corrigan visited All Souls – Chris's welcoming church which lives up to its name.

Chris Hudson, a Unitarian minister in Northern Ireland has been playing a key role in defusing renewed sectarian tension in Belfast after several days of rioting by Loyalists in September left more than 60 police officers injured. He has a long and distinguished history of peacemaking in Northern Ireland, for which he was awarded an MBE. Chris remains a trusted envoy after acting for many years during the Troubles as a secret go-between between the Irish government and Protestant paramilitaries (of the Ulster Volunteer Force) in the North.

He told me in a 'phone interview that the loyalist Paramilitary leaders he had been speaking to were keen to calm things down. "There've been several interventions," he said, "and the situation has become quieter." The trouble was sparked by Loyalist reactions to a Republican parade in Belfast.

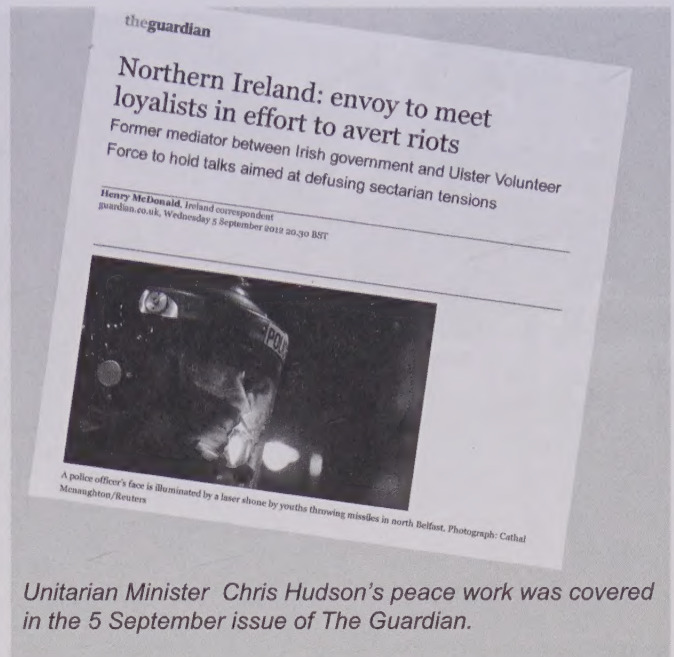
"The talks went well and I believe that the UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force) are committed to the continuous development of the Peace Process, saying later, "I think that we will see a lessening of tensions in North Belfast. Many people are working in the background to make this possible. Community conflict is a constant in Belfast, and has been for hundreds of years. Today's manifestations are a continuum of this communal violence. But I emphasised to the UVF the urgency for them to continue their programme of demilitarisation and to seek support in that process.

"I expressed my commitment to continue with whatever assistance I can bring to that process. Nobody in Northern Ireland has any intention of going back to the bad old days – bar a small group of extremists."

Chris is minister at All Souls Church in Belfast, part of the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland, a sister denomination to British Unitarians. He describes himself as a Unitarian Christian, and seems to embody reconciliation in his own history. As a Dublin-born trade unionist, raised Catholic with a staunch Republican ancestry, Chris became a Unitarian in Dublin. He later took what seems the unlikely step of training for the ministry in the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church (to which Dublin and Cork Unitarians are affiliated) – and then went on to become minister at All Souls six years ago.

And that's perhaps where the story becomes most interesting for us British Unitarians, as Chris has been creating a truly inclusive church at All Souls since then. How has it been, creating an inclusive place of worship?

Well, in addition to offering a home to traditional liberal Christians, All Souls has become a haven for minorities, including members of the gay community. Chris Hudson was the first Minister to wear a clerical collar on the Belfast pride march four years ago, and he has been honoured as a Hero of Belfast Pride. The official service to end Belfast Pride is held



each year at All Souls. Further, the congregation is increasingly reflecting the ethnic diversity of its South Belfast surrounds.

Then there is the theological diversity. The Non-Subscribers are essentially liberal Christian, they reject imposed creeds and they welcome Unitarians, Trinitarians and those who reject these labels (in this they are very similar to our own Free Christian tradition). Chris describes himself as a Universalist as well as a Christian, and All Souls has recently been attracting people from other religions, including Shintoism and Judaism, as well as agnostics and atheists.

Worship at All Souls has become more diverse too. For much of last year, a Jesus Praise band led the singing of two hymns each Sunday morning (accompanied by their own instruments) – these young people had joined the Church after becoming alienated by prejudice in evangelical circles. Now this group has been integrated into the larger All Souls choir, which leads singing each week – their repertoire and hymns seem to embrace a range of theologies and styles.

Sunday services include the Lord's Prayer, but readings tend to be from a variety of sacred books and from wider world literature (this is unlike most Non-Subscribing churches in Northern Ireland, where the Bible is the mainstay for readings).

All Souls is a growing church – it has around 200 members. At the recent Sunday service I attended, the congregation was more than 70-strong (which is about average for attendance). Social and cultural activities in the congregation – such as book and cinema clubs – are thriving. Meanwhile, several members have been trained as worship leaders.

I felt there was much to be learned from All Souls Church in Belfast.

Chris, how in practical terms do you accommodate the diversity of your congregation?

Not with too much difficulty because we say in All Souls we are building a Beloved Community. Whilst we may have a diversity of belief and faith and although we are an eclectic mix of people, we are united by our sense of purpose and that is building our community. We sometimes say we believe lightly

(Continued on next page)

Managing peace in communities



Chris Hudson says, 'Much political progress has been achieved in Northern Ireland. But at the community level, the peace has to be managed.' 2011 Ardoyne riots aftermath photo by 'Sineakee' via Wikimedia Commons

(Continued from previous page)
but love deeply.

Does the influx of new people, especially those who seem 'different', cause problems?

We have within our community people from different backgrounds; the obvious is people coming from the two main communities, Protestant and Catholic. But we have welcomed others, including those recently arrived. Some Muslim Arabs, Japanese, Ugandan, American and one from the Roma Community. All Souls is not perceived to be clearly identified with the political/cultural views of the two main communities but includes members of both. Many people who come new to All Souls comment on the friendly welcome and the wonderful chat at our coffee after the service. Difference in our church is to be celebrated and embraced.

How do you cater for the wide theological diversity in worship?

We have to be creative and imaginative especially in our song, music and worship. The spectrum of belief is quite varied. We have many young people from the LGBT community, who come from Evangelical backgrounds so we include praise hymns. We are sensitive to those coming from a Catholic background and this is also reflected in worship and music. Although our ethos is Christian and Christian values are at the centre of our faith, we make sure those who are agnostic or Humanist feel valued and have ownership of our community in harmony with others. We regularly include readings from other faiths and from humanist teachings. It is not about sticking all the bits together or calling ourselves multi-faith, but having a sense of oneness in our diversity which is captured in our worship.

Do you find your public role in Northern Ireland, including continuing peace work, gets in the way of your work with your congregation? How do you balance this?

The congregation respects my peace work and are aware of

my contacts with paramilitaries. To my knowledge congregational members understand the work that has to continue to maintain the peace within Northern Ireland, which in many parts is still a divided society. Much political progress has been achieved in Northern Ireland. But at the community level, the peace has to be managed. That is a responsibility for all of us. All Souls People know that. A small number of ex-paramilitaries now attend All Souls.

Have you a message for British Unitarians?

I would never dare to tell anyone else how they should organise their worship or run their church/meeting house. In my own experience, I learned to be more inclusive and not so precious about my own personal belief. I learned to understand the need for some people to have sacred ritual in their lives, which can be very moving. To be sensitive to those, who find the repetition of certain prayer, Lord's Prayer, a great comfort to them. I have learned that, to some, the traditional Christian story including the Resurrection is essential to their faith and they must equally feel they belong in our Beloved Community.

If we truly say all are welcome then we must mean it. That is why our name is 'All Souls'. Recently, I performed a wedding service for a young Muslim man and a Catholic woman. He had observed Ramadan and now was about to be married. He loved our sense of inclusion and although still a Muslim was delighted to sign our Church Register. We have Unitarians, Trinitarians and many other creedal positions but with a Universalist sense of inclusion. It is possible to share a space with others in freedom, inclusion and love – but not necessary to share the exact belief.

I personally believe that to some extent demarcation between different religions is breaking down. I would have more in common with some Catholics, who are liberal, than I would have in common with the more socially conservatives within the Non Subscribing Presbyterians in Ireland.

The Rev Jim Corrigan begins as minister to Ipswich and Framlingham Unitarians from 1 October.

ELECTION TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

Nominations are sought for the Executive Committee of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. There are five vacancies.

Candidates must be Full, Honorary or Associate members of the General Assembly or a member of a constituent congregation for whom a quota has been paid by their congregation. They should not be a student in training for the Unitarian ministry, a close family member of anyone employed by the GA, or connected professionally with Popularis. Requirements for the position are set out below.

Members wishing to nominate themselves for election to the Executive Committee should contact Popularis Ltd. 6 De Montford Mews Leicester LE1 7EU, Tel: 0116 254 2259; Fax: 0116 254 2258, Email: (annehock@popularis.org) on or after Monday 24 September 2012. Nominations close at 11.00am on Friday 19 October 2012.

Popularis will send appropriate documents to candidates by email or by post. Nomination sheets must be countersigned by an official of a Unitarian congregation or organisation supporting the nomination. Forms should be returned to Popularis by 19 October 2012.

Further information is available on the General Assembly website. www.unitarian.org.uk or from Derek McAuley, Chief Officer at Essex Hall. Details of the election process will also be sent to secretaries of all congregations and districts.

EC MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS

Candidates should:

- Demonstrate 3 years active commitment to the Unitarian community
- Be in sympathy with the Objects of the General Assembly
- Be eligible to stand in accordance with legal requirements

Essential Requirements

- (1) Experience in one or other of the following:
 - An officer or member of a congregational/district governing body.
 - An officer or member of a committee of an affiliated body.
 - An officer or member of a charity trustee body or similar eg voluntary organisations such as a sports club or parent teacher association.
 - As a Minister, Lay Pastor or Lay Person in Charge of a Unitarian congregation
- (2) Good understanding of the Unitarian community
- (3) Confidentiality

Desirable attributes include any or all of the following:

- Leadership
- Strategy development
- Communication skills
- Decision making
- Representation
- Financial awareness
- Team working

ELECTION SUPERVISION

Popularis Ltd, Independent Election Supervisor, 6 De Montfort Mews, Leicester LE1 7EU, Tel: 0116 254 2259, Fax: 0116 254 2258, Email: annehock@popularis.org have again been chosen to run the election.

TIMETABLE

24 September	Nominations open (4 weeks for nominations)
19 October	Nominations close
5 November	Ballot papers sent out

12 November	Election starts (5 weeks voting period)
14 December	Election closes
17 December	Results

ELECTION

If there are five or fewer members nominated they will be deemed to be elected unopposed.

The names, backgrounds, personal statements and a recent photograph of those nominated will be published on Uni-news, the GA website and in the Unitarian press. They will also be published in the Candidate Information Booklet to be sent to all voters.

The Candidate Information Booklet and ballot papers will be sent out to Full and Honorary members and to secretaries of all congregations during the week commencing 5 November. Associate members will receive a letter inviting them to request an individual voting paper from Popularis if they are not voting as a member of a congregation.

The voting system will be that agreed for 2010. The total number of votes to be cast by each voting member will equal the number of vacancies – five (5).

Results will be published on Uni-news, the GA website and in the Unitarian press as soon as possible after the election closes.

ROLE OF CONGREGATIONAL SECRETARIES

Secretaries of congregations are crucial in ensuring that all those members of their congregation who are entitled to vote receive information in good time to cast their vote. Secretaries should ensure that all such members receive:

- A voting paper
- A Candidate Information Booklet
- A prepaid envelope to return voting papers to Popularis.

The Electoral Panel is relying on secretaries to encourage all eligible members to vote in this most important election.

Electoral Panel

Jill Hudson, Wade Miller-Knight and Howard Wilkins

28 August 2012

Ragged-trouserer philanthropi

By Bill Darlison

You don't have to walk very far in Dublin before you come across the birthplace of some famous writer or other. James Joyce was born in Rathgar, George Bernard Shaw in Synge Street, and Oscar Wilde in Merrion Square. The poet Thomas Moore's birthplace is on George's Street – it's a pub now – and, on Harcourt Street, not a hundred yards from the Unitarian church, you can find the birthplace of Bram Stoker, the author of *Dracula*. These are all well-known, and are part of every literary tour. Not so well known is 37 Wexford Street, which I used to pass on my way to church every day. It's the birthplace of Robert Tressell, the author of the novel *The Ragged Trouserer Philanthropists*. Tressell died just over 100 years ago, in 1911, and so it is fitting that we celebrate his life and legacy at this time. What's more, in the light of the current financial crisis, his radical ideas are as relevant now as ever they were.

He was born Robert Noonan on 17 April 1870, the illegitimate son of Mary Noonan and Samuel Croker, a police inspector. In the early 1890s he emigrated to South Africa, married, and fathered a daughter, Kathleen. Following his wife's death in 1895, Robert and Kathleen moved to Johannesburg, where he gained a reputation as a skilled workman and a political radical. By 1901 he was in England, in Hastings, making a living as a sign writer and house painter. His health was failing. Like so many at the time, he was suffering from tuberculosis, and his condition was exacerbated by his poor living conditions and the long hours he had to work – when he could find work – in order to make ends meet.

Working men understood little of socialism

He was very intelligent and, despite his lack of formal education, very well read. He read Shakespeare, Dickens, Shelley, Swift, William Morris and John Ruskin, and was nicknamed 'The Professor' by his workmates. Very early in his life he became a socialist, and was heavily influenced by the writings of Marx and Engels. In the turbulent and impoverished years before the First World War he became a committed member of the Hastings Social Democratic Party, painting placards, designing pamphlets, and taking part in unemployed marches and political education campaigns. He encountered much opposition – principally from the working men themselves, who, he said, understood little of socialism even though they vehemently condemned it – and as part of his campaign to educate people in the ideals and principles of socialism he undertook to write *The Ragged Trouserer Philanthropists*, which, he said was to be a 'readable story full of human interest and based on the happenings of everyday life, the subject of socialism being treated incidentally'. He adopted the pseudonym 'Tressell' in honour of the tools of the decorating trade.

Robert never saw his book published. After his death, Kathleen took it round various publishers and it was eventually published in 1914. It has seen numerous editions since and has become something of a bible to generations of left-wing thinkers, many of whom will say that it introduced them to socialist thought or that it reinforced their previous convictions. I've bought at least five copies of the book over the last 40 years or so and I've lent them to friends who've never returned them. I hope they've been passed on.

A mind-blowing book

It's a big, rambling book, about 750 pages long, and even a novice reader can see that it would benefit from substantial editing. It's repetitive, preachy, naive, sentimental, angry and poorly constructed, with little in the way of character development. However, for all its obvious faults, it is inspiring, mind-blowing, and life-changing. It's an easy read, too, humorous in parts, and along with the humour

there is a disturbingly accurate portrayal of working class life in the industrial cities of early 20th century England which will tear your heart strings, and renew your commitment to social justice better than any political tract. It is also a deeply religious book, extolling a religion of humanity which honours Jesus' words – which he quotes frequently to highlight the hypocrisy of the rich and powerful who proclaim the message of Jesus while living in a way that runs diametrically counter to his teachings.

Dickensian at times

It tells the story of some painters and decorators who live in the fictional town of Mugsborough. Like Dickens, Tressell uses names as a shorthand delineation of character – Mr McChoakumchild and Mr Gradgrind in Dickens' *Hard Times* leave the reader in no doubt about Dickens attitude to these men. So, among Tressell's characters there's Slyme, the devout Christian, Crass, the foreman, Snatchum, the undertaker, Councillor Didlum and Councillor Grinder, Alderman Sweater, and Sir Featherstone Blood – to name but a few! The various decorating firms in Mugsborough are called Pushem and Sloggem, Bluffum and Doemdown, Dodger and Scampit, Snatchum and Graball, Smeeriton and Leavit, and Makehaste and Sloggem. There's little room for nuances of character in Tressell!

Cheerfully defending their own oppression

The citizens of Mugsborough work when they can, get into debt when they can't, live in cold houses, suffer all the illnesses associated with poverty, dress in hand-me-downs and jumble-sale clothing, eat bread and margarine. They undertake to work for a pittance, will even volunteer to work for less than their fellows if that ensures them a brief spell of employment. So, men who have been working for 7d an hour will be laid off to make room for those who will work for 6p. Men are sacked with no reason, dismissed without compensation or pension when they become too old to work – at some time in their early 50s – and, as often as not, after a lifetime of unrewarded effort, are unceremoniously dumped in a pauper's grave.

But, says Tressell, for all that they suffer in this way, the men do not rebel and support the system that keeps them in poverty. 'It's always like this,' they say. 'Nothing can change it. Just be glad you've got a job, and keep your mouth shut.' Their religious leaders are in cahoots with the rich, promising pie-in-the-sky in return for compliant silence. 'Parsons and publicans is the worst enemies the working man ever 'ad,' says one of his characters. And the newspapers they read – and quote from – *The Daily Obscurer* and the *Daily Chloer* – keep them in ignorance and reinforce their feeling that the system is beyond reform. They doff their caps to their 'betters', cheer for good fortune, wish them well, and thank them for giving them work.

Hence the strange title of the book. These men are ragged trousered philanthropists – men dressed in rags and living in hovels of goodwill and obeisance to people who wear the finest clothing.



The Robert Tressell Society in Hastings. 2012

Tell for the 'Great Money Trick'



the Robert Tressell
Wikimedia Commons

When the starving, bootless, ragged, stupid wretches fell down worshipped the System, and offered up their children as living sacrifices upon its altars.'

What is poverty? Tressell gives us an answer: 'Poverty is not merely in being without money, but in being short of the necessities and comforts of life – or in other words in being short of the benefits of Civilisation, the things that are all, without exception, created by work.'

One occasion Owen tells his workmates – to their great indignation and mocking disbelief – that poverty is not caused by foreigners coming in and taking jobs; it's not caused by women in the workplace; it's not caused by trade tariffs, as the Liberals claim; or lack of trade tariffs as the Tories claim; it's not caused by competition with industries in foreign countries. The cause of poverty is money. One of the central chapters of the book explains what he means. It's called *The Great Money Trick*, a title I've appropriated for this article.

I won't go into details – I hope you'll read the chapter for yourselves. He goes on to say that using a few slices of bread, three pocket knives and a few halfpenny coins Owen shows how the owners of the means of production – the capitalists – get the workers to work, appropriate the results of their work, pay them part of the value of their work and then sell part of their own products back to them. The inevitable result is that the rich man has increased his capital and the poor man remains where he started – with nothing, and sometimes, with less than nothing. As Tennessee Ernie Ford sang in the fifties:

*Load sixteen tons and what do you get,
After a day older and deeper in debt.
Never don't you call me 'cause I can't go,
'Cause my soul's to the company store.*

live in mansions. They do the work, live like slaves, in order that others can live in luxury. These men, who should be organising to defeat the system that enslaves them, are cheerfully defending it. 'The ones who are esteemed most of all and honoured above all the rest, are those who obtain money for doing absolutely nothing,' writes Tressell. 'It would be easy enough to convince them if they would only take a little trouble to understand, but he knew that they certainly would not "worry" themselves about such a subject.' He goes on:

It was not as if it were some really important matter, such as a smutty story, a game of hooks and rings or shove-ha-penny, something connected with football or cricket, horse-racing or the doings of some royal personage or aristocrat.

Although he sympathises with their plight, Tressell really has nothing but contempt for the resignation and wilful ignorance of the working men. They accept their own poverty, condemn their children to it, and refuse to listen to anyone who suggests a way for them to extricate themselves from it.

Money is the cause of poverty. Sounds strange today, too, doesn't it? And yet, looking at the current financial crisis who can doubt it? Hordes of workers lying idle, surrounded by work that needs to be done; countless half-built houses; raw materials in abundance, yet thousands of architects and builders out of work; massive 'debts' but no one precisely sure exactly who we are all in debt to; politicians blaming each other, ordinary people blaming foreigners, blaming the Chinese, blaming the bankers – blaming everybody but the system which few understand but nobody seems to question. Never before in human history has it been possible to produce enough to feed, clothe and educate every single human being on earth, wrote Tressell at the beginning of the 20th century. Now, 100 years on, our capacity is even greater and yet, as the Oxfam adverts tell us, every second a child dies because he lacks clean drinking water, and a good percentage of the world's population will go to bed hungry tonight.

Never saw the Russian revolution

The system is to blame all right, but I'm not as sure as Tressell was that it's easy to change. Those regimes that tried to follow Tressell's Marxist path have ended in dictatorship and tyranny. He wrote before the Russian and Chinese revolutions. But he also forgot one more thing, or perhaps, writing pre-Freud, he wasn't aware of it. The Great Money Trick is not just a cruel fiscal con-trick played on us all by capitalism: it is much more insidious. Money has tricked us into making it the yardstick by which we measure worth, the criterion we choose to compare ourselves against our fellows. It pretends to be the antidote to our insecurities and anxieties, even of our mortality. 'Love of money is the root of all evil,' says St Paul, and nothing has happened in the past 2000 years to show that he was wrong. Erich Fromm, the great 20th century Marxist Freudian thinker, said that our obsession with money and our love of it stems from the fact that we live our lives in 'having' mode and not 'being' mode. That is, we have come to believe that our happiness lies in accumulation and not in transformation. This is why Jesus told the rich young man to sell all he had and give it to the poor – to change the orientation of his life. Only then could he enter the kingdom of heaven, which means that only then would he be living a life of integrity, free from the distractions which blind him to his own spiritual needs, and fully open to the concerns and needs of his fellow human beings.

Jesus calls for radicalism

The gospel of Jesus is nothing less than a call to radical transformation of our nature. Without such a transformation we are condemned to live lives of spiritual poverty and to witness untold millions living in material poverty. Tressell's book presents this perennial problem in all its starkness. The treatment he suggests may be naive, but the diagnosis is correct, and I challenge you to read *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* and not be moved by its humanity and inspired by its righteous anger.

I also challenge you to read it and not to come away with a determination to reassess the ways in which Money is playing a great trick on you.

An electronic version of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* is available at <http://www.unionhistory.info/ragged/ragged.php>

It is also on Project Gutenberg and available for free at <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/3/6/0/3608/3608-8.txt>

Tressell's handwritten pages are placed alongside a printed transcript.

It is also available on www.Amazon.co.uk, with an ISBN of 0586090363.

The Rev Bill Darlison is a retired Unitarian minister.

GA Executive Committee meets

Executive Committee Key Messages

1 September 2012

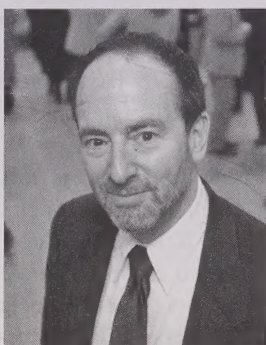
1. Meeting with District

Representatives, 17 November 2012

Arrangements were confirmed for the meeting with District Representatives which will take place from 1.00pm to 4.00pm on Saturday 17 November 2012 at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester. The objective of the meeting will be to involve 3-5 representatives from each District in discussion on key issues affecting the Denomination. An external facilitator has been appointed and Districts have been asked to help develop the agenda. Letters of invitation have subsequently been issued to District Secretaries.

2. Resignation of Rev Andy Pakula

It was with regret that the Executive Committee received the resignation of the Rev Andy Pakula with immediate effect. Andy was thanked for all his work as a member of the Executive Committee since 2009. As Andy's position was coming up for election it was agreed that no co-option would be made.



Andy Pakula

3. Budgets 2012/13

The congregational quota for 2012/13 was agreed as £30 per quota member as previously indicated. This is an increase of £1 on the current year.

The Executive Committee faced difficult decisions in making the budget balance for the financial year beginning 1 October 2012. The original estimates showed a substantial deficit which was not acceptable.

Despite expenditure being kept under control; the General Assembly, like many churches, is facing pressure on its income in a number of areas. This has a knock-on effect on matched funding from the Bowland Trust. Measures were agreed with the aim of increasing income; some of which carry a risk. Some of the requests for new spending were not approved. A budget was approved. Robert Ince, Acting Honorary Treasurer; Derek McAuley, Chief Officer and Martin Sarbicki, recently appointed Head of Finance and Administration were thanked for all their work in preparing the draft budget.

4. Safeguarding Policy

A revised Safeguarding Policy and manual was approved. Rev John Harley was thanked for leading on the review of the Policy as were all who had contributed. Further information will be circulated

on the responsibilities of congregations. All congregations were asked to ensure a representative attended the GA's forthcoming safeguarding awareness training arranged by the Local Leadership Strategy Group (unless they make alternative local arrangements).



John Harley

5. Executive Committee Elections

Arrangements are in hand for the forthcoming elections. The Electoral Panel comprises Jill Hudson, Wade Miller-Knight and Howard Wilkins who are responsible for ensuring a fair, free and transparent election process.

6. 2020 Congregational Development Fund

Arrangements are being made for a formal launch of the 2020 Congregational Development Fund which should be open for applications in early 2013. Lots of work has taken place on a website and promotion, worship pack and fund-raising plans.

7. Ethical Investment

The meeting received details of the General Assembly's current policy statement on social, environmental and ethical investment:

"The Executive Committee is anxious to invest in companies and trusts with good ethical standards and in particular mandate the Investment Manager to avoid investment directly into companies which are predominantly involved in the production of armaments, alcohol, tobacco or in gambling."

Newton's Investment Managers have confirmed that Lonmin – the mining company in South Africa – is not held in either of the two funds – Global Growth and Income and Socially Responsibility Investment – in which the General Assembly invests.

8. Millennium Fund

It was agreed to award Bury Unitarian Church £500 from the Millennium Fund as a contribution towards the installation of two sound enhancement systems in

areas adjacent to the worship area and which would include inductive loop systems for the benefit of people with hearing impairment.



Diane Bennett

9. Visibility Strategy Group

It was agreed to appoint Diane Bennett as a member of the Visibility Group.

Checking the obits, going back to bed

*I get up each morning and dust off my wits;
I open the paper, and read the obits.
And if I'm not in there, I know I'm not dead,
So I eat a good breakfast and go back to bed!*

I often sing the Pete Seeger version of this ditty to myself and in August a name and picture in the *obits* column of the *Guardian* leapt out at me. Laurence Dopson has died aged 88, and will be remembered by some as, to say the least, a gad-fly presence on the Unitarian scene a few years ago. He merited a *Guardian* obituary having cut quite a figure in medical journalism. The writer lists historic churches, local museums, mile posts, seaside piers and steam railways among Laurence's loves, the first of which is presumably what attracted him to our Mary Street Chapel, Taunton. I remember travelling on the (alas, not a steam) train to the GA Annual Meetings in Dundee in 1985, with a good number of other Unitarians who had joined the train at stations along the way.

As we were crossing the Scottish border, Laurence's unmistakable voice came over the public address system: "On behalf of British Rail, I would like to welcome on board delegates to the Annual Meetings of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, meeting this week in Dundee, wishing you a comfortable journey and successful annual meetings." We all beamed!

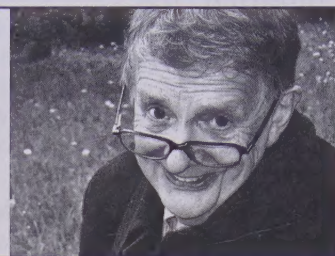
At Taunton he was for some time responsible for 'pulpit supplies' and persuaded some impressive people to preach, including, I recall, at least one bishop and a senior officer in the Salvation Army. Each Sunday (a good idea, this) he produced a poster for the chapel entrance, naming the preacher for the day. He insisted, however, in adding all their titles, letters before and after their name and significant role in the community. On one Sunday, Eileen Curtain (of blessed memory) one of the Western Union's loyal Unitarian lay preachers came along. There was her name on a poster with, underneath, the single word 'housewife'. So, when the moment came to begin the service, she walked boldly into the chapel with her books and notes under one arm, and, upright in the other hand, a feather duster, which she had found in a cupboard. Not long afterwards, Laurence's patience with Unitarianism ran out, and he left us.

In July I spotted a *Guardian* obituary for 95-year-old Derek Legge, whom I had met in the 1980s when, helped by the Hibbert Trust, I signed up for a course in adult education at Manchester University. The *obit* described him as one of the unsung heroes of the British adult education movement. Though unknown in Unitarian circles, he was well acquainted with the Unitarian contribution to the development of adult education in the 19th century, which was considerable, though now largely forgotten. Who now remembers Unitarian minister the Rev Henry Solly? If you ever spot a CiU (Club and Institute Union) sign outside a working men's club, note that Henry was the founder of such clubs, a significant social service project in its day and this year brings its 150th anniversary. They were not set up as just drinking clubs, as widely suspected. Solly was a teetotaler.

Derek Legge taught me that I should not use the old cliché and describe taking this course as going back to school. "One never 'goes back' to education," he said. "That suggests that

Funny Old World

By
John Midgley



education belongs in the past, in one's childhood, as though it were an engine at the back of a train, there to push you through the rest of your life. Better to think of education as an engine at the front end, to pull you forward, and in constant need of re-fuelling. It is not just for children. Learning is a lifelong process. Call it 'continuing professional development'." He had established the university's adult education department. "I had just one room, a part-time secretary and a filing cabinet. "First task was to start a library. At one time the University wanted to name this library after me," he said, "but I declined. I'm not interested in that sort of thing." The department has now grown to be the largest of its kind in the country. He was the sort of man one wishes had been a Unitarian.

Speaking of those who demur at self-publicity, Tim Berners-Lee's appearance in the Olympic Games opening ceremony caused something of a flutter on American TV. As already noted by our editor, Sir Tim somewhat unusually took a bow in the ceremony's historical sequence depicting the transition from the industrial age to the digital era, delivering his message to a (chance of a lifetime) audience measured in *billions*, saying of the world-wide web, "This is for everyone." One NBC TV co-commentator was heard to say, "If you've never heard of him, well, we haven't either." The channel then received a cascade of text messages howling at the commentators' ignorance, many suggesting that it was because Sir Tim is British. Actually, I think it is because he is not a personal publicity-seeker. So it seems the GA's strategy to raise our denominational profile is sometimes in competition with Unitarian modesty and British reserve. Oh dear.

Celia and I are basking in the rare experience of getting something right, having read, in the *Guardian*: "Where is the best mix of house prices, council tax, sun, low crime and health? We discover the perfect retirement idyll. The market town of Skipton, North Yorkshire, 'the gateway to the Dales' tops the list of the top ten places to retire, according to research by *Guardian Money* in partnership with credit reference agency *Experian*." It scored highly on many indicators: low crime, house prices, transport, neighbourliness and access to glorious countryside. *Experian* number-crunched 40 measures that make up 'quality of life' as rated by retirees, with special emphasis on air quality, population density, burglary rates, neighbourliness, good health and life expectancy. Skipton came out top, and they didn't even mention the prize-winning pie shop, or that pensioners get free haircuts at the local further education college. This bull's-eye of a choice on our part is light years away from the achievements of Tim Berners-Lee, but it can go in my *obit*, when the time comes.

The Rev John Midgley is a retired Unitarian minister.

Letters to the Editor

Unitarian 'ice' is melting

To the Editor:

Earlier this year it was announced that the GA had enough money to continue for about 10 years.

What did you as an individual do about this? Did you resolve to give more? Did you look at your life and ask yourself: 'What does my Unitarianism mean to me? Am I giving a regular sum that reflects adequately the way I feel about my faith?'

What did you as a congregation do about this? Did you talk to each other? I go on and on in my column every month about congregations talking to each other. I know you like a service. I know your weekly service time is valuable to you. But we are talking about our almost certain demise as a national organisation. Surely it is worth giving up one Sunday to discuss the future of the movement. The excuse: 'We are too old and too poor' will not serve. Could you join with another congregation and release valuable funds? Could you get rid of an expensive building and meet somewhere cheaper?

Ask yourself, while you still have the General Assembly, is there anything the GA could do to help you? In 10 years' time you could have a crumbling building and one member. What are you going to do then? There will be no one to save you, support you. Are you prepared to sacrifice yourselves now in order to pump funds into an initiative to support those congregations with the potential to grow? Could you be a congregation with the potential to grow? Talk about it. Talk about it now. The announcement about the lack of funds was the first wake-up call. Remember the first discussions about climate change? Andy Pakula's interview in the 15 September *Inquirer* is the sound of glaciers melting and falling into the sea. Please, don't wait for the polar bears to die. Do something now.

Every year people declare how important Unitarianism is to them. Over and over again people announce that they wished they had discovered Unitarianism earlier. We believe, don't we? that we have a faith system purpose-built for the 21st Century and the Secular Age but in 10 years' time

we could be 'a relatively small number of congregations linked informally and lacking support.'

Or perhaps you don't agree. Write in to *The Inquirer* explaining why. Or write in and tell us all what your congregation has discussed and agreed on.

Dorothy Haughton
Crickheath, Oswestry

For Rosa Parks, there were no 'perfectly good seats'

To the Editor:

It is perhaps unfortunate that before submitting copy for his column "Funny old World" in *The Inquirer*, (1 September), John Midgley did not check the accuracy of a quotation he used from a piece by two United Reform Church ministers, David Coleman and Zam Walker, which concluded: '... But were there not perfectly good seats at the back of the bus for black people when Rosa Parks insisted on sitting at the front?'

What, I ask myself, was "perfectly good" about a seat to which you were restricted because of your race or skin colour? Whether or not the ministers' question was a tortuous long-distance metaphor or a pallid piece of irony – on any occasion a very delicate semantic manoeuvre to undertake – I do not know.

In an interview given to Scholastic Publishing in 1997, (See: <http://teacher.scholastic.com/rosa/interview.htm>) Rosa Parks described what

actually happened in Alabama on that Montgomery bus, 1 December 1955:
I did not sit at the very front of the bus; I took a seat with a man who was next to the window – the first seat that was allowed for "coloured" people to sit in. We were not disturbed until we reached the third stop after I boarded the bus. At this point a few white people boarded the bus, and one white man was left standing. When the driver noticed him standing, he spoke to us (the man and two women across the aisle) and told us to let the man have the seat. The other three all stood up. But the driver saw me still sitting there. He said would I stand up, and I said 'No, I will not.'

Then he said 'I'll have you arrested.' She was arrested, jailed and fined. Demand for a boycott of the buses escalated and a young Montgomery minister, Martin Luther King, was

selected to lead the campaign. The rest, as they say, is history ...

Naomi Linnell
NUF member

BDSM practices flout Unitarian ethos

To the Editor:

Dorothy Haughton's support for *The Unitarian* item on bondage, domination and sado-masochism misses the point. (*Inquirer* Letters, 1 September) What caused offence was not reference to 'Fifty Shades of Grey', but to publication of a 'sermon' promoting BDSM as desirable.

Our churches and chapels were established for the worship of God; we claim to espouse freedom, reason and tolerance.

Where is the freedom in bondage and domination? Where is the tolerance in deliberately inflicting pain on another human? Where is the reason in deriving pleasure from doing so? Where in the Unitarian and Free Christian ethos is endorsement of any of these practices that pervert precious minds and bodies and put them at risk of injury?

Welcoming people to worship with us does not imply support for those who try to disguise their cruelty under the alias of being merely 'kinky.' May we never let our own desires come between us and the love of God.

Mike Cuerden
Dean Row, Cheshire

Inquirer letters policy

Letters should be succinct. It is preferable that they are sent by email to inquirer@btinternet.com. Typewritten or legible handwritten submissions may be sent to the editor at 46A Newmarket Road, Cringleford, Norwich NR4 6UF.

Letters should be signed with the writer's full name and, if applicable, the name of the group or congregation with which the writer is affiliated. A postal address and telephone number are required, for verification purposes. Letters will be edited for length and content and may appear in an excerpted form. Any affiliations listed with letter writers' names are for identification purposes only, and should not suggest the view expressed is representative of that body.

Kenneth Ridgway a strong, thoughtful man

By Rosemary Ridgway

I first met Ken over 50 years ago, when we were both living in a Methodist Hostel in London. He worked initially for an insurance company, and then transferred into the insurance side of banking. He dressed appropriately for the city: pin-stripe suit, bowler hat, and the obligatory rolled umbrella. He drove a Reliant Robin 3-wheeler car (which somehow didn't fit the same image), which he told me he chose as he could easily strap his double bass onto the roof.

Ken had several interests. His favourite sports were cricket and rugby union. He enjoyed music, and had an avid interest in Egyptology. He enjoyed languages, ranging from Sanskrit to Romanian. His favourite comedians were the Goons and Benny Hill. He wasn't into: DIY, decorating gardening, or exercising! He had no interest in computers, and continued to type out his correspondence on a very old manual typewriter.

We married in 1963, and shortly afterwards moved North, to the outskirts of Manchester. By then, Ken had decided to train as a Unitarian minister, and he began 3 years of training at the Unitarian College. Ken's first ministry was at Hale Barns in Cheshire. From there he became the minister at Cross Street Chapel, in Manchester. While we were there our eldest daughter, Rowena, was born. Two years later Caroline arrived, and Ken took up ministry at Fulwood Old Chapel, in Sheffield. Our years spent in Chapel House, overlooking the Mayfield Valley, were good years. For some reason an incident there came to mind this week, when one of the girls brought home a goldfish – in a plastic bag – that they had won somewhere. I remember we found it a temporary home in the birdbath, until a neighbour who had a pond agreed to take it.

We moved to Leeds in 1983, when Ken became minister at Mill Hill Chapel. The appointment lasted only a year, after

which Ken had a breakdown. With the house going with his job the years after that were hard. We moved to the Wakefield area when I retired, and coincidentally were both drawn to the Quakers in recent years – Ken to Ackworth Meeting, and myself to Wakefield Meeting.

I mentioned Ken's interest in languages, and the Romanian interest built up in the 1960s, when he somehow talked me into taking a 3000 mile trip in 1968, *by motor-bike*, to Romania. Unitarianism there – especially in Transylvania – was strong, despite persecution from the likes of Ceausescu, and we had a wonderful reception. Mention was made in the pages of the Manchester Evening News, complete with a photograph and account of our trip. I think the word 'intrepid' was used in the headline, as, while we were there, the Russians invaded Czechoslovakia, and we were effectively stranded for a week behind the 'Iron Curtain', with all frontiers closed.

Ken was there at one of the lowest points in my life. He had organised another trip back to Transylvania in 1972, this time for about 30 Unitarians. My father came with us, for his first holiday abroad, and his first flight. Shortly after arriving in Romania, my father became seriously ill – and he died out there. His death affected me greatly, and I remember being astonished that the world carried on as normal, irrationally hoping it would somehow slow down, or maybe even stop for a while, so I could catch up.

Ken and I were together for 40 years. He wasn't perfect, none of us are, but he gave me the two most wonderful daughters. Ken shared my pride in what they have achieved. Rowena and Caroline are thoughtful, generous and strong. Together with David, Jasmine and Holly, Dylan and Finlay, – they are all very special people.

George Cox: anything but a dull life

By Bob Redpath and Catherine Robinson

George Cox, born in 1916, grew up in north-east London. His life-long commitment to pacifism began while still at school; persisted throughout World War II, when he was granted unconditional exemption from military service as a conscientious objector; and found its fullest expression after the war, when he served for many years as the Vice-President of the World Disarmament Campaign. He often proclaimed his vision of the future in a quotation from Tennyson's poem, 'Locksley Hall': *the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world*.

But it was a mutual love of music that brought together George and Gwenllian Foxall. As a young man he had studied singing part-time at the Guildhall School of Music, and it was always his proud boast that he could reach the high B flat of 'Nessun Dorma'. He sang with choirs in Wales and with the London Welsh Choir. He and Gwen were married in 1944 and began their married life in Cardiff. They had two daughters, Angela and Rosemary (and eventually four grandchildren). Gwen combined motherhood with her career as a teacher.

George was employed by Customs and Excise in Swansea, Plymouth, and London. It was in Plymouth in 1966 that he first encountered Unitarianism, attracted by the Christian Socialist views of the church's minister, Tony Cross. George and Gwen became active members of the Plymouth congregation, and he

helped to found a hostel for ex-prisoners in the city.

On his retirement from the Civil Service in 1976, a new life began for George. He was appointed Secretary of the Social Responsibility Department of the Unitarian General Assembly. He and Gwen visited communist countries in Eastern Europe to make contact with Unitarians. Between 1978 and 1984 they visited Romania, Budapest, Prague, Moscow, and finally Sofia. George and Gwen represented Unitarians in the International Association of Religious Freedom (IARF), the Christian Peace Conference, and the World Congress of Faiths.

George and Gwen belonged to Bessels Green Unitarian Church for 28 years while they lived in Sevenoaks. In 1998 they moved to Oxfordshire and joined the Chapel Society of Manchester College Oxford. In recent years they were too frail to attend services in the chapel (Gwen reached her 98th birthday in the week that George died, aged 95), but they maintained their interest in the Chapel Society, and are both fondly remembered for their forthright views and keen enjoyment of life. Interviewed by Bob Redpath for the Oxford newsletter in 2007, Gwen remarked: "*After 63 years George and I are still getting to know one another ... I soon realised that life with George would be anything but dull, and I was right!*"

Bob Redpath and Catherine Robinson are members of the Chapel Society of Manchester College Oxford.

Ann Peart honoured for presidency

By Bob Pounder

As the Rev Dr Ann Peart's presidency of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches drew to a close earlier this year, a celebratory meal in her honour was held at the Chancellors Hotel. Significantly this Manchester venue, formerly known as The Firs and built for Sir Joseph Whitworth in 1850, has associations with several radicals of a bygone age including John Bright and Richard Cobden. The property also became the residence of CP Scott, editor of the Manchester Guardian.

Before inviting the Rev Jane Barraclough to say grace, President of the MDA (Manchester District Association of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches), Ken Johnson reflected the celebratory mood of this auspicious event by saying, "We are here tonight to celebrate Rev Dr Ann Peart's presidency of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, which is the greatest honour that can be bestowed on any Unitarian – and she is one of us – a member of the Manchester District. Let me welcome you all to mark the great honour which Ann has achieved. I hope you will all enjoy the evening together."

Ken's hopes were surpassed as the evening was passed in comfort conviviality.

Buoyed up by the sustenance of good food and good company, tributes to Ann's role as GA president followed one after the other beginning with words from Chief Officer Derek McCauley who in bringing greetings from the General Assembly remarked on her capacity for work he said, "I we all know how busy she's been and if you want to get anything done ask a busy person and Ann is always a busy person."

The Rev Jane Barraclough, minister of Cross Street Chapel acknowledged the busy life that Ann was experiencing as GA president but thanked her for her continuing support of Cross Street Chapel, and for finding time to attend the chapel and to lead worship.

The principal of UCM (Unitarian College Manchester), the Rev Alex Bradley paid tribute to Ann who is also a former principal of UCM, as a 'strong link', 'somebody who has given so much'. He went on to say, "It is our pleasure from the Unitarian College Manchester, to bring our warmest greetings"

Dawn Buckle on behalf of the East Cheshire Union of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches brought greetings and a reminder of Ann's early days at Hyde Chapel. Dawn said, "We congratulate you for a hard working and well-travelled year!"

The Rev Jean Bradley on behalf of the Women's League, both from the district and nationally said, "We send you our special greetings."

The Rev Gillian Peel speaking on behalf of the Unitarian Ministerial Fellowship thanked Ann for all her hard work as the GA president remarking that anyone who has taken on this role knows what a hard task it can be.

Ken closed the tributes to Ann with a sincere and moving speech. He concluded by saying, "What could be more apt – she is a Unitarian to the core – she began as a child at Hyde Chapel where at their last AGM she played a major part in the proceedings. As I said at the beginning, the General Assembly presidency is a great honour to Ann and well deserved. She has already acquitted herself with distinction in her visits to almost all the churches and chapels in the country. Ann, we are



The Rev Penny Johnson presented the Rev Dr Ann Peart with a bouquet. Photo by Bob Pounder

proud of you and may you continuing to give us all the benefit of your ardour as a great Unitarian for many years to come."

To laughter, Ann replied, "I have been pinching myself to see if I'm still alive – it's the kind of things that have been said at funerals!" She paid tribute to former presidents of the GA who were present that evening: Geoffrey Head, John Midgley, Dawn Buckle and Celia Midgely and gave thanks to the Rev Penny Johnson for organising the evening's event.

In closing, Ann remarked, "It's good to be together, to laugh together, it's a sign of a caring community. We can only enjoy this Fellowship because our ancestors campaigned and suffered for our freedom to associate as dissenters. If we had tried to meet in the 18th century we would have been accused of treason. We have come a long way since then. Particularly this week, it's been good to mark Cross Street's place as a pioneer for being the first, licensed for a religious group to celebrate civil partnership.

Reminding everyone that there are still many parts of the world where even basic civil rights are not enjoyed by the people, Ann said, "So, I will ask you now to join me in a toast to civil and religious liberties the world over".

The Rev Bob Pounder is minister at Oldham.

Music Society fills Christmas 'gap'

The eight hymn CDs produced by the Unitarian Music Society (UMS) are proving very popular and supporting worship for numerous congregations using the green and purple books.

But there was a gap – nothing for Christmas. Now the gap is plugged. The UMS at its summer conference recorded *Sixteen Hymns and Carols for Christmas, Chanukah and Advent*. This includes almost all the Christmas seasonal hymns in *Hymns for Living* and and Andrew Hill's 'Festive Season' hymn (No.94) in *Sing Your Faith*.

This CD (CD5 in the series) will support various services throughout December. And you just might like to use it for seasonal listening. It was recorded on a beautiful sunny day at Great Hucklow in late summer with Nick Morrice playing piano and organ and some splendid, warm singing. Something to think about in cold December!

CD5 is available now for £7 (including post and packing). Order from David Dawson, 9, Olicana Park, Ilkley, West Yorkshire, LS29 0AW. Tel. 01943 608354

E-mail: dcdawson3@hotmail.com Please try to order early – It may not be possible to supply the CD from mid-November through to Christmas.

– David Dawson